MARVEL
PG 23

EXILES™

WITH AN IRON FIST
PART 1

NEW YORK CITY.
THE UNITED STATES CAPITAL.

It is a reality **unlike** any other. It is different in so many ways from the worlds we have come to know.

This reality-- this Earth-- has known plagues, wars, famine, and natural catastrophes **beyond imagination.**

But in any reality there are **common facts.** Such as, in times of great strife, **greater leaders** are made.

That in times of great weakness, strong leaders must assume **control.**

This was a **weak** and **desolate** planet.

WITH AN IRON FIST
PART ONE

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And Tony Stark-- Iron Man-- is a strong leader.

He is not merely the President of the United States, and President for life as part of an emergency edict some ten years ago--

--he is also the undisputed monarch of Earth.

It was a long and agonizing road that brought him to power. In the end, nearly every living being on Earth begged and prayed for him to assume this mantle.

He slowly did so. With great reluctance. With a heavy heart.

What very few living beings know is that Tony Stark had planned it this way all along.

One does not take a planet by force, that is, if one wants to remain in power. It is always better to be given control.

In times of great weakness, a single individual can rise up and assume immense control. Stark knew this.

All he had to do was make the world weak enough.

He spent his early career acquiring conglomerate after conglomerate.

It was done with such care, such **patience**... a parent company here... a subsidiary of another **three** subsidiaries there... figure-heads... **untraceable** origins.

In no time at all, Stark Industries had an economic stranglehold over the globe. But since Tony Stark never **tightened** that grip, they would **never** know.

Iron Man entered the world theater when **The Mutant War** began.

Under the command of **Magneto**, a worldwide army of mutants launched an unwavering attack upon all of humanity.

It pitted **every** super being on the globe against the mutant soldiers of Magneto. There was terrorism on American soil the likes of which had **never** been conceived before.

Many were lost-- both hero **and** civilian.

But it was unknown-- to all but a few-- which secret individual actually **assisted** in creating this mutant army. Funding their **murderous** operations over and over again.

Stark had **succeeded** in thinning out the world's **super-being** population.

In return for his traitorous acts against his own race--

--Magneto promised Iron Man **leadership** of the remaining vestiges of humanity.

That **was** the role that Stark sought, but **not** in the manner in which it was being **granted.**

Not as an underling.

BREEETZ

Slaying Magneto while **millions** watched on, Iron Man became the **hero** of the conflict. But a soldier does not make a **leader.**

It was when the **Great Famine** ripped the world apart that Stark's **ascension** truly began.

A powerful virus, not unlike **Mad Cow Disease,** seized the entire meat, pork and poultry industry, leaving most animals unfit for human consumption.

Within a year of that, a **new** strain of fungal rot devastated **half** the world's wheat production.

Worse than any war it **ever** faced, the United States felt **true** hunger for the first time. The rest of the globe suffered, as well.

Millions died.

FOOD RATION

Until Stark Industries developed counter-measures and vaccines. In just under a **year**, the world was filling its bellies again.

Stark accepted the **Nobel Prize** in Stockholm, Sweden a year later.

STARK

Stark would never admit it, but he was **surprised** at how quickly his **"bugs"** threw the world into starvation--

--but not how quickly his name was suggested as a **presidential nominee** when he put food back on the plates of the world.

TEMPUS

Hero, scientist, savior... he won with the highest popular and electoral vote in history. He was nearing his final goal.

LANDSLI

When he secretly developed technology to control weather and seismic activity, **all** the other dominoes fell into place.

Massive "natural" disasters of **biblical** proportions in Europe and Asia led to those countries' pleas for assistance, and of course, their **willingness** to relinquish control.

Economic downspine in Central America and Canada paved the way for the remainder of North America to fall under his direction.

They all came to **him**. He **never** asked. He never twisted **any** arms. The sun would never set on the **empire** of the United States.

With the world at his feet, it seemed **Doctor Doom** would be Stark's only true **adversary.**

Magneto was not the only one Stark had approached about a secret alliance.

But this time, it was **Stark** who was betrayed.

Their original agreement stipulated that Doom would launch an attack on **Washington, D.C.**--

--destroying the last remnants of the United States' political structure.

The leader of **Latveria** kept **his** part of the bargain.

The city was leveled, killing nearly **all** of the country's federally elected government officials, as well as the Supreme Court.

The branches of America's democratic system died along with them.

The blame was to fall on the last remnants of the rebel mutants' army. Their **last gasp.**

NEW YORK CITY
THE PRESENT...

Who wants to know this, Marcus?

Roxanne Malveer of *The National Review*, Mr. President.

I wasn't aware that *The National Review* had become a fashion periodical.

Well, no sir, but I don't think their inquiry about when you might be redesigning your armor is necessarily *fashion.*

I ***know.*** I was being facetious.

Remind them that my current armor was specifically designed to aid in the ***recovery*** from my battle with Doom.

Inasmuch as I'd like to update it, I'm told by my physicians that it will be at ***least*** three years before that day comes.

Let's have the *Washington Bulletin* run an op-ed comparing President Stark's heroism to FDR, a president wheelchair-bound from polio.

No. We ***won't*** do that. Just let the quote ride as is...

...and ***speaking*** of *The National Review*, I want the Editor in Chief ***removed.***

When you say ***removed,*** sir, do you mean...?

Yes. Please have her killed.

The media is ***our*** tool. Not her @#$% ***soap-box.*** I'm tired of her accusations and criticism.

Now, if you'll all excuse me, this broken body is ***actually*** due for a medical checkup.

STARK'S PERSONAL MEDICAL CENTER...

Mr. President.

Doctor.

May I turn off the *hologram?*

...Yes.

BOOOP

Better.

The *grafts* are taking.

You call this *better*, you quack? It looks like I shaved with a *blowtorch.*

No, sir, you look like you sustained a *radiation blast* from a *foot* away.

Explain to me again why I let you *live?*

Because, Mr. President, I am the *most* gifted *cosmetic surgeon* in history--

and you're an *enormously* vain priss who wants to look like a *fashion model* again

Oh, yeah. *That* was it.

Sir? *Sir!?* We have some very--

Oh.

SonoFa-

What is it?!

BEEDOOP

Forgive the interruption. I would *never* dream of--

WHAT IS IT!?

We've just gotten word from the *NAS Com base* in the Pacific. They think they've received a reading that could be *them.*

Who?!

Sir... them.

That *is* good news

ELSEWHERE...

Sire, we have tried *everything* imaginable

The only way we can effectively repair the *stabilizers* is to break the surface.

The city will *flood* if we do not rectify these malfunct ons soon.

And . to make the repairs we need to shut down the *cloaking shield.* Repairs will take hours..

...but I fear that even the *briefest* exposure will allow our enemies to obtain an energy signature and discover our whereabouts. If we have not been detected already...

Sire, we *must* face the harsh reality

Our days of hiding have *ended.*

The *Inhumans* have come *out* of the shadows.

THE INHUMANS THRONE ROOM...

She is **Susan Storm Richards.** *The Invisible Woman. Widow of Reed Richards, Mr. Fantastic of the Fantastic Four Queen of the Inhumans.*

He is **Black Bolt.** *The silent Monarch of the Inhumans, the mysterious and separatist race of super beings. Known for both their power and their singular uniqueness.*

The man they are receiving counsel from is Arcutus. He is Chief Scientist of the Inhumans-- and he has brought **grave news.**

In this reality, the Inhumans have had to adapt to the harshness of the realm. They live in **deep seclusion.**

They are a **hunted race.**

THE CITY OF ATTILAN
DEEP BELOW THE PACIFIC OCEAN...

The glorious city of ATTILAN, the home of the Inhumans, is actually a massive vessel that migrates from locale to locale.

They run for their preservation.

They flee to ensure their way of life.

The Inhumans run in fear.

Take us to sea level, *Arcutus*, and begin your repairs

Gorgon... prepare all that you can for *battle*

Sire, is that not *premature*?

No... of course, Sire... I know... it is *inevitable*...

I *never* thought this day would come, Cousin Karnak. I suppose I have deluded myself.

No, Gorgon, we had all *hoped* we could evade this encounter, but-- this human-- this *monster*-- Stark-- is not *satisfied* with merely lording over the planet of his birth.

He seeks to rule *the stars* and conquer other warring hordes like the *Skrulls* or the *Kree*. To do that, to enslave a *universe*, one needs an *army*.

No *human* army will do.

Given the chance, he will do what he has always *threatened*. To him, we are not *living* creatures with blood pumping through our veins, but *untapped* sources of *power*.

We will all be captured and used as *breeding stock* for his wars among the stars.

He will tear into our *flesh* and study our *DNA*. The only future for us will be *pain* and *death*.

Does Black Bolt have a *plan*, Karnak?

Black Bolt *always* has a plan, Gorgon.

THREE HOURS LATER...

The repairs are complete, but Arcutus believes that we've been discovered

Black Bolt... please... tell me what... what we're to do?

G? The G... barrier? Oh... oh. Yes...

Our last gift from Reed... yes.

We won't be able to use the Cloak with it activated. It disrupts all the power couplings and we...

All right.

I'll go tell Arcutus to begin the necessary preparations

It was Reed Richards, Sue's husband, who discovered Tony Stark's **ultimate** *plan during the* **Mutant Wars.**

It would mean **death** *for Richards as well as Medusa, the wife of Black Bolt, and dozens of others.*

It was only a matter of time before Sue and Black Bolt found **comfort** *from their grief in each other's arms.*

Comfort that would become **love.**

THE CITY OF ATTILAN'S ENGINE ROOM...

Sue Richards has loved just **two** men in her life. Reed Richards was a man so full of **knowledge** that he could barely **restrain** himself from speech.

The other, Black Bolt, is cursed with an **uncontrollable** power brought on by his **voice**.

One **whisper** from his lips could topple a **mountain**. A spoken word could level entire **cities**.

So Reed could never **shut up**, and Black Bolt never **talks**.

Both of them were very emotionally distant, as well.

The irony is **not** lost on her. **Nor** is it appreciated.

NEW YORK CITY
THE OVAL OFFICE...

Mr. Pres dent, we have confirmation on sate·lite. **Attilan** is visible just 100 miles off the coast of the Marshall Islands ·n the Pacific.

Do we have a "go"?

Go. Take them al ve Or at east **most** of them

OVER THE PACIFIC OCEAN...

This is **Generator Alpha. Operation Impound** is a go! I repeat we are a **go!**

Battalions Alpha, Beta, Delta, Gamma follow my lead!

We have **visual contact** with the Inhumans. A division of **flyers** are coming at us.

Prepare for evasive action. **Capture**, not kill. Repeat--

--capture, not k' aa

ARRGGGHH!

INSIDE ATTILAN...

Arcutus! We need the G-Barrier *now!* A few more minutes and they'll be *inside* the perimeter!

We are just a moment away, m'lady

We have to make sure that it's properly *powered up!* If we activate it too soon, we won't have enough power for a *second try!*

*This is Gamma Leader-- we have **eight** secured and in need of **transport!***

Affirmative, Gamma. Contain targets. Shuttle Echo Delta Niner is en route. Be ready for stage two.

We're *ready!*

Fall back! All divisions fall back

Damn! Generator Four to Alpha Leader! They're in retreat!

We read you, G-4! Pursue them into Attilan.

Affirmative, Alpha Leader! But I think they were playing possum. They're flying a hell of a lot faster all of a sudden.

Alpha Squad, shake and bake! We've got them wetting themselves! Pursue and capture

This is Brakon! We are all within the perimeter, Arcutus!

Repeat all flyers are inside the perimeter, Arcutus! We're safe!

Then you will be the only ones.

CRA-KAACK!!

KOOOOOOOOMMMM

BAAA-

Before Tony Stark was President, before the Mutant War, the demigod **Galactus**, the World Devourer, came to Earth to feed upon its energies.

Arriving in a **weakened** state, the mighty being was defeated by Earth's **most powerful** heroes. While Galactus lay dying, Reed Richards struck a bargain. He would save Galactus' life in exchange for **assurances** that he would **never** return to feast on Earth.

Galactus agreed. To ensure that he be **forced** to keep his word, Galactus left Reed Richards the means to create a force field that even Galactus could not breach.

Before his death, Richards left it to the Inhumans.

He **knew** that Galactus was not the **only** power-hungry creature to desire Earth...

THE OVAL OFFICE...

...Some were born here.

Sir... the activation of the shield alone sent a shock wave that... well...

...they're gone, sir. All four battalions. Nearly 40,000 in all--

And the force field is impene-trable.

Yes. It's disintegrating everything we're throwing at it.

Keep trying. Report back if there's any change.

Yes, Mr. President.

Hopeless...

What in hell--

BLOOONK!

All of you stay right where you are or you'll be dead where you stand!

Hello, President Stark.

Unfortunately, Doom attempted to **overthrow** Stark.

He failed.

In the **end**... as it has been since that day...

...there is only **Tony Stark-- Iron Man.**

Sovereign of Earth.

I'm *Gambit.*

We're *Weapon X...*

...and we're here to set things *right.*

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TO BE CONTINUED...